

## NGTA won't go forward: Wynne

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Ontario's Liberal government has no plans to pave over the escarpment, according to Transportation Minister Kathleen Wynne, who was in Burlington Monday to discuss the controversial Niagara to GTA corridor.

Wynne assured local politicians and citizens' groups gathered at the roundtable meeting that the provincial Liberals aren't moving forward with a 33-km highway that connects Hwy. 403 in Ancaster to north Burlington.

### Congestion

"People need to move around. There is congestion on the roads and we need to address that. But we don't need to destroy environmentally-sensitive land in order to do that," said Wynne, during a media scrum at Burlington's Old Springer House.

"The fundamental thing I hear is that people in this community are very concerned about a road that will disrupt a sensitive environmental area that really is the basis of the quality of life in the area. That's why our government stepped back from this."

Asked about the cost and timeline of the Niagara to GTA corridor if it were to move forward, Wynne said she wouldn't speculate. "That detailed work has not been done because we're not moving ahead with it."

She acknowledged that Ontario and North America are behind their Asian and European counterparts when it comes to transit systems. "I think part of the problem is we have such a huge land mass. We thought we didn't have to worry about land running out, air quality or water quality. We're realizing now we have to shift the culture and we have to be much more intelligent about the decisions we make on transportation," she said, pointing to investments in GO Transit and HOV lanes.

Asked about the GTA West corridor, Wynne said there's a difference between the two proposals. "That again is a very contentious issue...there's a different sensibility in the communities. What's unique here (Niagara to GTA) is there's a strong multi-community consensus on what needs to happen in the area."

Burlington Mayor Rick Goldring said a major concern for north Burlington residents is the development that typically follows a highway.

"Burlington is a unique community with 50 per cent urban land and 50 per cent rural. We want to preserve the rural character of north Burlington. The natural tendency would be for development to migrate to that northern highway."

He added that the Niagara to GTA highway, for many Burlingtonians, will be the number one issue leading up to the Oct. 6 provincial election.

Halton Regional Chair Gary Carr said he's pleased the Niagara to GTA corridor has been removed from the Region's official plan, but suggested that all provincial candidates and their party leaders must be questioned on their stance when it comes to plans for the highway.

Provincial PC leader Tim Hudak is a strong supporter of the Niagara to GTA corridor and has said the highway will spur job creation in the Niagara region, Hamilton and the GTA.

The Niagara to GTA study was first proposed in 2001 by the Mike Harris PC government.

When Dalton McGuinty was elected in 2003, he put the brakes on the highway, saying it would have to undergo an extensive environmental assessment.

The Niagara to GTA Corridor Study looked at two route options: one that connects Hwy. 403 in Ancaster to Hwy. 401 west of Milton and one that connects Hwy. 403 to Hwy. 407 close to Walker's Line in Burlington.

The roundtable meeting was organized by Liberal candidates Karmel Sakran (Burlington), Indira Naidoo-Harris (Halton) and Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale MPP Ted McMeekin.